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THE PROGRESS OF THE NON-VIOLENT REVOLUTION IN INDIA¹

By Taraknath Das, Calcutta, India

An amazing thing is taking place in India. Probably in no other country in the world as it is today could there grow a movement like the one which is in full swing in India under the leadership of Mahatma M. K. Gandhi. By the example of his own consecrated life, by his gentleness and simplicity, by his understanding of the Indian temperament and faith and ideals, he has summoned a following and built up a technique of non-violent revolution that is baffling to the British government and a challenge to the whole world. As a protest against the massacre of unarmed men, women and children by General Dyer at Amritsar, Mahatma Gandhi asked the the people of India to stop working. All India stopped.

The unusual conduct of their strikes by the Indians might serve as an example of the application of this new weapon. Those strikes have been occurring with ever increasing frequency for some time. Not only do the workers make the usual demands for higher wages and better conditions, but they are using industrial action in a revolutionary spirit to express their opposition to the government. When the government tried to run the street cars in Calcutta and Delhi to break the strike, the strikers did picket duty in a unique manner. They did not attack the "scabs" nor destroy the property; they simply laid themselves prostrate on the tracks. It is hard to win a victory over a man who folds his arms and who is not afraid to die.

In 1910 Count Leo Tolstoy wrote to Mahatma Gandhi, who was then carrying on by passive resistance his struggle

¹The Editors assume no responsibility for policies advocated in this article.

against the efforts of the South African Government to deport the Indians from South Africa:

Your activity in the Transvaal, as it seems to us, at the end of the world, is the most essential work, the most important of all the work now being done in the world, in which not only the nations of the Christian world but of all the world, will unavoidably take part.

Whether the nations of the world will follow Mahatma Gandhi and his method of bringing about revolutionary social and political changes without any violence is yet to be seen, but it is a fact that about one-fifth of the human race is moving at breakneck speed to bring about revolution in India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, with his gospel of *Satayagraha*, *Swaraj*, and non-coöperation without violence. *Satayagraha* stands for the ideal of being steadfast to truth and righteousness without fear of any consequences. *Swaraj* stands for self-rule or human freedom, social, political, and economic. Non-violent non-coöperation against the Government to paralyse it, and coöperation amongst the people to build a state within a state, are the means by which Gandhi seeks to bring about a revolution in India.

This is the latest development of the general movement for Indian independence which started in 1905. For a lucid portrayal of the causes of the Indian Revolution the reader is referred to a recent work by Prof. A. Demangeon of the Sorbonne entitled *America and the Race for World Dominion*.²

India is an entire world. . . . She is the typical colony for exploitation. Immense, rich and thickly populated, she represents for her masters at once a fortune and a defence. It is through India that the British Empire assures its destiny. India is the halting place of British commerce to the Far East. India gives the fleet places of support for the sea routes. India recruits for the army legions of high-spirited soldiers; native contingents fought for Britain in China and South Africa. During the Great War, India supplied more than a million men, of whom more than 100,000 were killed. It may be said that she conquered Mesopotamia and vanquished Turkey. India is for

² Pages 209-215.

Great Britain an enormous market; two-thirds of her importations come from English sources; she furnished 51 per cent of the wheat production of the Empire; 58 per cent of tea; 73 per cent of coffee, and almost all the cotton. An immense British capital is invested in the mines, the factories, the plantations, the railways, and the irrigation work of India. India pays the interest on probably more than three-hundred and fifty million pounds sterling. India keeps busy an army of British officials whose salaries she pays and whose savings go every year to Great Britain. She pours into the British coffers the interest on her public debt, the pensions of old officials, the governmental expenses of her administration. More than thirty-million pounds sterling a year is the estimate of the sum that India pays in the United Kingdom to her creditors, stock-holders and officials. At that, we don't know how much she brings to the merchants who trade with her and the shippers who transport her goods. *Never has the term exploitation been better applied. Despite the appearance of a powerful material civilization, poverty rules everywhere among the masses; the peasants are always in debt; India pays an enormous tribute to the ruling nation; the crops don't ripen every year, and many die of famine; India exports annually food to the value of forty million pounds sterling while tens of millions of its inhabitants are still, in the twentieth century, threatened by want.* It is since 1905 that the nationalistic movement in India has become strong enough to disturb Great Britain. . . . An Indian revolt driving out the English would shake the foundation of the British Empire; it would change the map of the world.

Mahatma M. K. Gandhi is leading the Indian revolution with his new weapon of non-violent non-coöperation so effectively that it is rocking the foundation of the British Empire. The Lloyd-Geroge government is anxious to settle the Irish issue as quickly as possible so as to mobilize the strength of the British Empire against India. It is Sir Valentine Chirol who says that "India is moving at breakneck speed." Sir. Michael O'Dwyer says "the extremists in India are talking of establishing a Republic in India," and Sir William Vincent, Secretary of the Interior of India, in a recent speech to the Legislative Council in India has solemnly declared that

The situation in India is very critical and no one can exaggerate it. It is not the 6 per cent of Indian *intelligentia* with whom we are to deal now, but with the 90 per cent of peasants and laborers of India, who are following Gandhi and his programme so blindly.

The so-called India reform act, which has created a system of diarchy in India as an installment of self-government, does not concede much to the Indian people. The truth about the so-called reformed legislative assembly is that:

It has little more authority than a debating society. Under this act the governor-general and his British colleagues will have full power to over-ride the legislative assembly. The very fact that out of 315,000,000 people only 5,000,000 or about $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of the people have the right of suffrage, so limited is the franchise by onerous property qualifications, shows that the Indian reform act is pure mockery. The so-called reform legislature of India has no authority or control over bills dealing with factories, mines, railways, shipping, navigation, waterways, ports, irrigation, water-storage, customs, currency, coinage, land revenue, the military, the police, law, order and justice.

The governor-general in council controls this vast field of legislation and also has the absolute veto power over any law.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted the Indian people to have nothing to do with this mockery and thus presented the program of boycotting the so-called reformed council. The result was that more than 80 percent of the voters did not vote and none of the recognized Indian leaders took part in the election as candidates. Mr. Lajpat Rai, who is known to the American public as a constitutionalist leader of the Indian people, in his recent speech on "The Present Situation in India," delivered in Bombay on April 4, has characterized the moderate politicians of India who have joined the government forces and accepted the reform act as

Persons who at the bar of Indian public opinion would be guilty of treason, and you will find that the government has purchased the support of every moderate leader of the country.

Under the leadership of Mahatma M. K. Gandhi, Indian Nationalists through the organization of the Indian National Congress, the most representative political body in India, are engaged in creating a "state with the state," as the ancient Christian fathers did to overthrow Roman

Imperialism. This "state within the state" is already functioning, in a measure, in India. In many of the villages the Panchayet System has been revived, based on the principle of the old-time community government which existed before the British occupation, in which people of all classes participate. Indian courts of arbitration are meting out justice. British courts are boycotted. National volunteers are organized into a police force to maintain peace and order. In Bombay, and in some other cities, the striking postal employees, with the coöperation of the people, have organized an Indian postal system which they intend to extend throughout the country. The Gandhi movement thus is defeating the old British régime by the construction of a new national state.

The program of boycotting the British courts and establishing courts of arbitration has become so successful that the All India Congress Committee in its session of April 1 held in Bezwada has adopted a resolution to this effect:

That All India Congress Committee congratulates the country on the rapid progress made in the organization of the panchayets (committees of five) and trust that the people will make still greater efforts to boycott the government law courts.

The All India National Congress has established its national treasury and has designated it as the Tilak Memorial Swaraj Fund. By June 30 it raised over eleven millions of rupees from the people of India for the purpose of perfecting a nationwide civil organization of the Indian people. As a counterpart of this movement it has been accepted as a part of the program that by June 30, 1921, there should be ten million regularly enrolled members of the Indian National Congress who will work for the attainment of *Swaraj*. The boycotting of British goods and the reviving of Indian industries are progressing so swiftly that the Lancashire merchants are in distress and over 600,000 operatives of cotton mills of Lancashire are now out of employment. Mahatma Gandhi is sanguine that India will attain her goal of *Swaraj* in the near future

because the masses are with the program and they are more active than the leaders. To furnish the masses with the means of procuring food and clothing is the first thing to do, and so he proposed that 2,500,000 hand looms be immediately distributed among the people. In this connection, Mahatma Gandhi said:

The awakening of the masses is phenomenal and while the masses are fully alive to the urgent need of realizing Swaraj, the leaders are lagging behind. It is therefore necessary to give form and shape to the aspirations of the masses. Their aspiration for *Swaraj* is based upon the definite perception that without Swaraj their condition could not improve and the first step in improving their condition is to enable them to clothe and feed themselves. If the masses are enabled to perceive that by securing their economic independence through the use of spinning-wheels in their houses, so as to obtain the wherewithal to feed and clothe themselves, it will immediately have the effect of making them feel that they are no longer dependent on foreigners for their livelihood and progress. It will also affect a complete economic boycott of the most important foreign imports (Manchester cotton goods) in the country.

The revolutionary movement in India is bringing about phenomenal social changes in Indian life. The latest report from India states that in the Bengal Provincial Congress (one of the Provincial organizations of the Indian National Congress) over two thousand women were present, of whom two hundred were delegates. It has been reported that the renowned poetess, Sarojini Naidu, reviewed the National Volunteer Corps of Bombay the other day. The Indian National Volunteer movement, which will naturally become the National Police and Defense force, is progressing so fast that in Barisal District alone there are 159 of these organizations.

Side by side with the movement for political freedom for India, the labor movement has made tremendous progress. Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Congress, and particularly Lajpat Rai, the President of the First Trade Union Congress of India, appreciate the importance of this feature. Labor organizers in India expect that before the year is over they will have an organization with no less than five million members who will use its power for

the political and economic independence of the Indian people. That labor is whole heartedly with the *Swaraj* movement and Mahatma Gandhi is proved by the very fact that in spite of all the efforts of government officials labor inaugurated general strikes in various cities in India as a protest against the visit of the Duke of Connaught and practically boycotted him. The labor movement is gaining tremendous strength all over India, and will play a leading part in bringing about Indian independence.

The peasants are supporting the program of non-violent non-coöperation with the greatest enthusiasm, and they have in various districts, particularly in the District of Rai Berali, gone to the extent of refusing to pay taxes to the government. The government has used violence against the people. Many were shot, and killed or wounded and hundreds were put in prison.

Mahatma Gandhi's movement for the self-purification of the people of India (the giving up of all that is evil and disintegrating) has become more successful than any social reformer of any age could even imagine. In spite of government encouragement of consumption of liquor and opium in India, the people are forsaking these habits. It has been reported that in the District of Barisal, where 51 opium shops were in existence, 50 of them have been obliged to close up. Because of the success of the campaign against drugs and drinks the Congress Committee has adopted the following resolution:

This Congress Committee congratulates the country on its spontaneous response to the principle of self-purification underlying the movement of non-violent non-coöperation, by taking up a campaign against the drink evil, and trusts that the habit of taking intoxicating drinks and drugs will totally disappear from the land by the persistent and continued efforts of self-sacrificing workers.

The British Indian government has become so much alarmed at the success of Mahatma Gandhi's new method of non-violent non-coöperation that it has through its officials urged the patriot-saint of India to give up the program temporarily so that Lord Reading will have a chance to size

up the situation. Mahatma Gandhi has refused to stop the operation of his program and has asked for vigorous action to carry on work for national freedom, but at the same time he enjoins the people of India not to put extra difficulty in the way of Lord Reading:

Non-coöperators must do nothing to add to his [Lord Reading's] difficulties. We must give His Excellency the fullest credit for meaning to do well. I will also warn them against building hopes on Lord Reading *doing* anything. This is a battle of self-reliance. We must create the environment for our free nourishment, and among the things we must do, one is to secure the goodwill of true men and women by our exemplary behavior.

The government of India, like the czarist government, has begun its campaign of repression by declaring a seditious meetings act (a kind of martial law) and putting in prison those active in the *Swaraj* movement. Not a week passes without some persons being put in prison for political offenses of a non-violent character. But no repressive measures can ever check the rising tide of a movement for the freedom of a nation of 315,000,000 people. Victims of governmental tyranny are martyrs to their cause and they are inspiring the people with greater devotion, thus repeating the history of oppression in Ireland. The people are so infuriated that they are demanding the sanction of Mahatma Gandhi for the wholesale application of the principle of civil disobedience. The All India Congress Committee in its Resolution No 4 announced: "Civil Disobedience was adopted in principle and the language was left to be drafted by Mahatma Gandhi."³

The Congress Committee also adopted the following resolution congratulating political prisoners:

All India Congress Committee congratulates all those who are suffering by way of imprisonment or otherwise in the cause of religion and *India's freedom*.

Repressive measures inaugurated by the frightened government of India have resulted in several riots and

³ *The Bombay Chronicle*, April 4, 1921.

Mahatma Gandhi in an open letter to the governor-general of India puts the responsibility on the shoulders of the government.

That the progress of the revolutionary movement in India is peacefully undermining the very foundation of the British rule in India can be understood from the resolutions adopted in a meeting of the All India Congress held in Bombay on June 14 and 15, Mr. Gandhi presiding. Two important resolutions are as follows:

Be it resolved that non-coöperators should in the event of prosecution or civil suit being brought against them not participate in the proceedings beyond making before the court a full statement of the facts in order to establish their innocence before the public. The Working Committee is further of the opinion that where security is demanded from non-coöperators under provision of the Criminal Procedure Code, they shall refuse to furnish such security and offer to undergo imprisonment.

With reference to a question raised to the propriety of Indians assisting hostilities against the Turkish government of Angora, the Working Committee is of the opinion, that consistent with the non-coöperation resolution adopted by the special session of the Congress held at Calcutta, it is the duty of every Indian to refrain from helping the British government in the prosecution of such hostilities in direct defiance of Musalman opinion, and it is therefore the duty of the Indian soldier class to decide not to serve in connection therewith.

The significance of these resolutions is self-evident. The people of India are to ignore the right of the British courts to try them and the only defense against the government persecution and prosecution is to defy the authority of the court and make their defense by issuing statements to the Indian public. Actual practice of this theory will undoubtedly destroy the authority of "Law and Order" so far as the British government is concerned and the people of India are not to coöperate with the defense of the country. To make the magnitude of the situation clear I may mention that the American people can realize the significance of the grave situation if they picture the state affairs which might have been produced in this country if the majority of the people refused to obey the Conscription Act, refused to buy the Liberty Bonds, refused to

aid in war work, and then defied the courts' jurisdiction in trying these people violating the law of the land. No government can ever exist for a long period under such popular opposition.

The stage of offering passive resistance has passed and the stage of direct action has come in the history of non-violent non-coöperative revolution in India, as can be seen from the following news-item.

The Belgum District Khalifat Congress yesterday passed a resolution declaring that they would have to declare an Indian Republic in consultation with the Congress, if Great Britain directly or through the Greeks, openly or secretly, fought the Turkish government of Angora.⁴

It is quite evident that the Indian Revolutionary movement has passed the Boston Tea Party stage:

The non-coöperative movement in India has taken another turn, the most recent demonstration of its program being the boycott of foreign cloth, inaugurated by the public burning of supplies of clothing. A crowd of 15,000 people was present at a huge bon-fire of clothing made from foreign cloth which Mahatma Gandhi himself ceremoniously lighted. . . . Gandhi made a speech in favor of an independent India and the righting of the Caliphate's wrongs. The proceedings were quite orderly owing to the presence in force of military and police. Efforts are being made also to involve the military and police in the movement.⁵

That the movement is supported by revolutionary national strikes can be understood from the fact that an epidemic of strikes is prevalent all over India. The *Bengalee* of Calcutta, dated June 21, speaks of a meeting supporting the strikers in the following way:

A monster meeting of the citizens of Calcutta was held in the College Square on the 18th instant at 6 p.m. to place on record its whole-hearted support of the Railways and steamers strikes in East Bengal. Babu Sasaknajiban Roy presided and about four thousand people were present. The President in opening his address said that the strikes started in East Bengal by the Railways and Steamship employees were neither "sympathetic," nor were they "labor" strikes at all. He liked to style them as

⁴The *Bengalee* (Calcutta), June 23, 1921.

⁵The *Christian Science Monitor*, August 3, 1921.

“national” strikes. In truth they were acts of non-violent non-coöperation inspired by righteous indignation. . . .

It is beyond doubt that the tide of revolution in India has reached a state which can not be stemmed and in the coming session of All India National Congress to be held in Ahamedabad, the home-town of Mahatma Gandhi, during the coming Christmas week we may hear of the performance of the ceremony of the Declaration of Independence and the formal inauguration of the Congress of the Republic of the United States of India, as was done during the session of the Continental Congress of America in 1776.

Mahatma Gandhi is not only leading a political revolution in India, but he is also working for a social revolution in India, and, at the same time, is giving a new ideal to the civilized world. He spiritualizes revolution, he depends upon non-violence. He is leading hundreds of millions of people to learn that the human soul can not be coerced. He advises the people of India to be fearless if they are in the right. In his address to the students of Madras he exhorts them:

If the rulers are doing what in our opinion is wrong, and if we feel it our duty to let them hear our advice, even though it may be considered sedition, I urge you to speak sedition. . . . but at your peril. You must be prepared to suffer the consequences and not hit below the belt, then I think you will have made good your right to have your advice heard even by the government. Let the world know that India's message is not the message of physical might, but a message of love. And then it will be your privilege to conquer the conquerers, not by blood-shed but by sheer spiritual predominance. I, as a passive resister, will give you another thing to think about and practice. Terrorize yourself; search within; by all means resist tyranny wherever you find it, by all means resist encroachment upon your liberty, but not by shedding the blood of the tyrant. That is not what is taught by our religion. Spiritualize the political life and the political institutions of the country.